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APPOMATTOX

General Joshua L. Chamberlain



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Paper Read before the New York Commandery
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October Seventh, 1903

By *Lawrence*
General Joshua L. Chamberlain

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APPOMATTOX

BY BREVET MAJOR-GENERAL JOSHUA L. CHAMBERLAIN, U. S. VOLS.

I AM to speak of what came under my observation in the action at Appomattox Courthouse and the circumstances attending the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, April 9, 1865.

You will understand that I am not attempting to present matters upon a uniform scale or to mark the relative merits of participants. This is only the story of what I saw and felt and thought,—in fact, my personal experience, including something of the emotions awakened and the reflections suggested by that momentous consummation.

In order that you may understand the pressure of conditions and the temper of our spirits in this last action, permit me to recur briefly to the situation of affairs. The great blow had been struck, the long hold loosened. Lee's communications had been cut; his intrenched lines broken and overrun; his right rolled up; Richmond and Petersburg evacuated by the Confederate forces and officials, and in our possession; his broken army in full retreat, or rather, desperately endeavoring to get off,—either to Danville, to effect a junction with Johnston in North Carolina, or to Lynchburg, where they might rally for one more forlorn but possibly long resistance. Meade with two corps of the Army of the Potomac—the Second and Sixth—was pressing Lee's rear; while Sheridan with his cavalry—three divisions—and our Fifth Corps of infantry under Griffin was making a flying march to circumvent Lee's path and plans; our combined forces all the while seeking to draw him to final battle, or compel him to surrender.

The 8th of April found the Fifth Corps at Prospect

Station, on the South Side Railroad, nearly abreast of the head of Lee's retreating column, while Meade was with his two corps close upon Lee's rear at New Store, ten miles north of us, across the Appomattox. At noon of this day General Ord, of the Army of the James, joined us with two divisions of the Twenty-fourth Corps under General Gibbon, and Birney's division of the Twenty-fifth Corps,—colored troops; Ord, by virtue of seniority, becoming commanding officer of the whole. He was a stranger to us all, but his simple and cordial manner towards Sheridan and Griffin, and even to us subordinates, made him welcome. We pushed on,—the cavalry ahead.

The Fifth Corps had a very hard march that day,—made more so in the afternoon and night by the lumbering obstructions of the rear of Ord's tired column, by courtesy given the road before us, the incessant check fretting our men almost to mutiny. We had been rushed all day to keep up with the cavalry, but this constant checking was worse. We did not know that Grant had sent orders for the Fifth Corps to march all night without halting; but it was not necessary for us to know it. After twenty-nine miles of this kind of marching, at the blackest hour of night, human nature called a halt. Dropping by the roadside, right and left, wet or dry, down went the men as in a swoon. Officers slid out of saddle, loosened the girth, slipped an arm through a loop of bridle-rein, and sunk to sleep. Horses stood with drooping heads just above their masters' faces. All dreaming,—one knows not what, of past or coming, possible or fated.

Scarcely is the first broken dream begun when a cavalry man comes splashing down the road, and vigorously dismounts, pulling from his jacket front a crumpled note. The sentinel standing watch by his commander, worn in body but alert in every sense, touches your shoulder. "Orders, sir, I think!" You rise on elbow, strike a match, and with smarting, streaming eyes read the brief, thrilling note, from Sheridan—like this, as I remember: "I have cut across the enemy at Appomattox Station, and captured

three of his trains. If you can possibly push your infantry up here to-night, we will have great results in the morning." Ah, sleep no more! The startling bugle notes ring out "The General!"—"To the march!" Word is sent for the men to take a bite of such as they had for food: the promised rations would not be up till noon, and by that time we should be—where? Few try to eat, no matter what. Meanwhile, almost with one foot in the stirrup you take from the hands of the black boy a tin plate of nondescript food and a dipper of miscalled coffee,—all equally black, like the night around. You eat and drink at a swallow; mount, and away to get to the head of the column before you sound the "Forward." They are there—the men: shivering to their senses as if risen out of the earth, but something in them not of it! Now sounds the "Forward," for the last time in our long-drawn strife; and they move—these men—sleepless, supperless, breakfastless, sore-footed, stiff-jointed, sense-benumbed, but with flushed faces pressing for the front.

By sunrise we have reached Appomattox Station, where Sheridan has left the captured trains. A staff-officer is here to turn us square to the right,—to the Appomattox River, cutting across Lee's retreat. Already we hear the sharp ring of the horse-artillery, answered ever and anon by heavier field guns; and drawing nearer, the crack of cavalry carbines; and unmistakeably, too, the graver roll of musketry of infantry. There is no mistake. Sheridan is square across the enemy's front, and with that glorious cavalry alone is holding at bay all that is left of the proudest army of the Confederacy. It has come at last,—the supreme hour! No thought of human wants or weakness now: all for the front; all for the flag, for the final stroke to make its meaning real. These men of the Potomac and the James, side by side, at the double in time and column, now one and now the other in the road or the fields beside. One striking feature I can never forget,—Birney's black men abreast with us, pressing forward to save the white man's country.

I had two brigades, my own and Gregory's, about midway of our hurrying column. Upon our intense procession comes dashing out of a woods road on the right a cavalry staff-officer. With sharp salutation he exclaims: "General Sheridan wishes you to break off from this column and come to his support. The rebel infantry is pressing him hard. Our men are falling back. Don't wait for orders through the regular channels, but act on this at once!"

Sharp work now! Guided by the staff-officer, at cavalry speed we break out from the column and push through the woods, right upon Sheridan's battle-flag gleaming amidst the smoke of his batteries in the edge of the open field. Weird-looking flag it was: fork-tailed, red and white, the two bands that composed it each charged with a star of the contrasting color; two eyes sternly glaring through the cannon-cloud. Beneath it, that storm-centre spirit, that form of condensed energies, mounted on the grim charger, Rienzi, that turned the battle of the Shenandoah,—both, rider and steed, of an unearthly shade of darkness, terrible to look upon, as if masking some unknown powers.

Right before us, our cavalry, Devins's division, gallantly stemming the surges of the old Stonewall brigade, desperate to beat its way through. I ride straight to Sheridan. A dark smile and impetuous gesture are my only orders. Forward into double lines of battle, past Sheridan, his guns, his cavalry, and on for the quivering crest! For a moment it is a glorious sight: every arm of the service in full play,—cavalry, artillery, infantry; then a sudden shifting scene as the cavalry, disengaged by successive squadrons, rally under their bugle-calls with beautiful precision and promptitude, and sweep like a storm-cloud beyond our right to close in on the enemy's left and complete the fateful envelopment.

We take up the battle. Gregory follows in on my left. It is a formidable front we make. The scene darkens. In a few minutes the tide is turned; the incoming wave is at high flood; the barrier recedes. In truth, the Stonewall

men hardly show their well-proved mettle. They seem astonished to see before them these familiar flags of their old antagonists, not having thought it possible that we could match our cavalry and march around and across their pressing columns.

Their last hope is gone,—to break through our cavalry before our infantry can get up. Neither to Danville nor to Lynchburg can they cut their way; and close upon their rear, five miles away, are pressing the Second and Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac. It is the end! They are now giving way, but keep good front, by force of old habit. Half way up the slope they make a stand, with what perhaps they think a good omen,—behind a stone wall. I try a little artillery on them, which directs their thoughts towards the crest behind them, and stiffen my lines for a rush, anxious for that crest myself. My intensity may have seemed like excitement. For Griffin comes up, quizzing me in his queer way of hitting off our weak points when we get a little too serious; accusing me of mistaking a blooming peach tree for a rebel flag, where I was dropping a few shells into a rallying crowd. I apologize—I was a little near-sighted, and had n't been experienced in long-range fighting. But as for peaches, I was going to get some if the pits did n't sit too hard on our stomachs."

But now comes up Ord with a positive order: "Don't expose your lines on that crest. The enemy have massed their guns to give it a raking fire the moment you set foot there." I thought I saw a qualifying look as he turned away. But left alone, youth struggled with prudence. My troops were in a bad position down here. I did not like to be "the under dog." It was much better to be on top and at least know what there was beyond. So I thought of Grant and his permission to "push things" when we got them going; and of Sheridan and his last words as he rode away with his cavalry, smiting his hands together—"Now smash 'em, I tell you; smash em!" So we took this for orders, and on the crest we

stood. One booming cannon-shot passed close along our front, and in the next moment all was still.

We had done it,—had “exposed ourselves to the view of the enemy.” But it was an exposure that worked two ways. For there burst upon our vision a mighty scene, fit cadence of the story of tumultuous years. Encompassed by the cordon of steel that crowned the heights about the courthouse, on the slopes of the valley formed by the sources of the Appomattox, lay the remnants of that far-famed army, counterpart and companion of our own in momentous history,—the Army of Northern Virginia—Lee’s army!

It was hilly, broken ground, in effect a vast amphitheatre, stretching a mile perhaps from crest to crest. On the several confronting slopes before us dusky masses of infantry suddenly resting in place; blocks of artillery, standing fast in column or mechanically swung into park; clouds of cavalry, small and great, slowly moving, in simple restlessness;—all without apparent attempt at offence or defence, or even military order.

In the hollow is the Appomattox,—which we had made the dead-line for our baffled foe, for its whole length, a hundred miles; here but a rivulet that might almost be stepped over dry-shod, and at the road crossing not thought worth while to bridge. Around its edges, now trodden to mire, swarms an indescribable crowd: worn-out soldier struggling to the front; demoralized citizen and denizen, white, black, and all shades between,—following Lee’s army, or flying before these suddenly confronted, terrible Yankees pictured to them as demon-shaped and bent; animals too, of all forms and grades; vehicles of every description and non-description,—public and domestic, four-wheeled, or two, or one,—heading and moving in every direction, a swarming mass of chaotic confusion.

All this within sight of every eye on our bristling crest. Had one the heart to strike at beings so helpless, the Appomattox would quickly become a surpassing Red Sea horror. But the very spectacle brings every foot to an

instinctive halt. We seem the possession of a dream. We are lost in a vision of human tragedy. But our light-twelve Napoleon guns come rattling up behind us to go into battery; we catch the glitter of the cavalry blades and brasses beneath the oak groves away to our right, and the ominous closing in on the fated foe.

So with a fervor of devout joy,—as when, perhaps, the old crusaders first caught sight of the holy city of their quest,—with an up-going of the heart that was half pæan, half prayer, we dash forward to the consummation. A solitary field-piece in the edge of the town gives an angry but expiring defiance. We press down a little slope, through a little swamp, over a bright swift stream. Our advance is already in the town,—only the narrow street between the opposing lines, and hardly that. There is wild work, that looks like fighting; but not much killing, nor even hurting. The disheartened enemy take it easy; our men take them easier. It is a wild, mild fusing,—earnest, but not deadly earnest.

A young orderly of mine, unable to contain himself, begs permission to go forward, and dashes in, sword-flourishing as if he were a terrible fellow,—his demonstrations seemingly more amusing than resisted; for he soon comes back, hugging four sabres to his breast, speechless at his achievement.

We were advancing,—tactically fighting,—and I was somewhat mazed as to how much more of the strenuous should be required or expected. But I could not give over to this weak mood.

My right was “in the air,” advanced, unsupported, towards the enemy’s general line, exposed to flank attack by troops I could see in the distance across the stream. I held myself on that extreme flank, where I could see the cavalry which we had relieved, now forming in column of squadrons ready for a dash to the front, and I was anxiously hoping it would save us from the flank attack. Watching intently, my eye was caught by the figure of a horseman riding out between those lines, soon joined by another, and

taking a direction across the cavalry front towards our position. They were nearly a mile away, and I curiously watched them till lost from sight in the nearer broken ground and copses between.

Suddenly rose to sight another form, close in our own front,—a soldierly young figure, handsomely dressed and mounted,—a Confederate staff-officer undoubtedly, to whom some of my advanced line seemed to be pointing my position. Now I see the white flag earnestly borne, and its possible purport sweeps before my inner vision like a wraith of morning mist. He comes steadily on,—the mysterious form in gray, my mood so whimsically sensitive that I could even smile at the material of the flag,—wondering where in either army was found a towel, and one so white. But it bore a mighty message,—that simple emblem of homely service, wafted hitherward above the dark and crimsomed streams that never can wash themselves away.

The messenger draws near, dismounts; with graceful salutation and hardly suppressed emotion delivers his message: "Sir, I am from General Gordon. General Lee desires a cessation of hostilities until he can hear from General Grant as to the proposed surrender."

What word is this! so long so dearly fought for, so feverishly dreamed, but ever snatched away, held hidden and aloof; now smiting the senses with a dizzy flash! "Surrender"? We had no rumor of this from the messages that had been passing between Grant and Lee, for now these two days, behind us. "Surrender"? It takes a moment to gather one's speech. "Sir," I answer, "that matter exceeds my authority. I will send to my superior. General Lee is right. He can do no more." All this with a forced calmness, covering a tumult of heart and brain. I bid him wait a while, and the message goes up to my corps commander, General Griffin, leaving me mazed at the bod-ing change.

Now from the right come foaming up in cavalry fashion the two forms I had watched from away beyond. A white flag again, held strong aloft, making straight for the little

group beneath our battle-flag, high borne also,—the red Maltese cross on a field of white, that had thrilled hearts long ago. I see now that it is one of our cavalry staff in lead,—indeed I recognize him, Colonel Whitaker of Custer's staff; and, hardly keeping pace with him, a Confederate staff-officer. Without dismounting, without salutation, the cavalryman shouts: "This is unconditional surrender! This is the end!" Then he hastily introduces his companion, and adds: "I am just from Gordon and Longstreet. Gordon says 'For God's sake, stop this infantry, or hell will be to pay!' I'll go to Sheridan," he adds, and dashes away with the white flag, leaving Longstreet's aide with me.¹

I was doubtful of my duty. The flag of truce was in, but I had no right to act upon it without orders. There was still some firing from various quarters, lulling a little where the white flag passed near. But I did not press things quite so hard. Just then a last cannon-shot from the edge of the town plunges through the breast of a gallant and dear young officer in my front line,—Lieutenant Clark, of the 185th New York,—the last man killed in the Army of the Potomac, if not the last in the Appomattox lines. Not a strange thing for war,—this swift stroke of the mortal; but coming after the truce was in, it seemed a cruel fate for one so deserving to share his country's joy, and a sad peace-offering for us all.

Shortly comes the order, in due form, to cease firing and to halt. There was not much firing to cease from; but "halt," then and there? It is beyond human power to stop the men, whose one word and thought and action through crimsomed years had been but forward. They had seen the flag of truce, and could divine its outcome. But the habit was too strong; they cared not for points of direction, but it was forward still,—forward to the end; forward to the new beginning; forward to the Nation's second birth!

But it struck them also in a quite human way. The

¹I think the first Confederate officer who came was Captain P. M. Jones, now U. S. District Judge in Alabama; the other, Captain Brown of Georgia.

more the captains cry "Halt! the rebels want to surrender," the more the men want to be there and see it. Still to the front, where the real fun is! And the forward takes an upward turn. For when we do succeed in stopping their advance, we cannot keep their arms and legs from flying.

To the top of fences, and haystacks, and chimneys they clamber, to toss their old caps higher in the air, and leave the earth as far below them as they can. Dear old General Gregory gallops up to inquire the meaning of this strange departure from accustomed discipline. "Only that Lee wants time to surrender," I answer with stage solemnity. "Glory to God!" roars the grave and brave old General, dashing upon me with impetuosity that nearly unhorsed us both, to grasp and wring my hand, which had not yet had time to lower the sword. "Yes, and on earth peace, good will towards men," I answered, bringing the thanksgiving from heavenward, manward.

"Your legs have done it, my men," shouts the gallant, gray-haired Ord, galloping up cap in hand, generously forgiving our disobedience of orders, and rash "exposure" on the dubious crest. True enough, their legs had done it,—had "matched the cavalry" as Grant admitted, had cut around Lee's best doings, and commanded the grand halt. But other things too had "done it"; the blood was still fresh upon the Quaker road, the White Oak Ridge, Five Forks, Farmville, High Bridge, and Sailor's Creek; and we take somewhat gravely this compliment of our new commander, of the Army of the James. At last, after "pardoning something to the spirit of liberty," we get things "quiet along the lines."

A truce is agreed upon until one o'clock,—it is now ten. A conference is to be held,—or rather colloquy, for no one here is authorized to say anything about the terms of surrender. Six or eight officers from each side meet between the lines, near the courthouse, waiting Lee's answer to Grant's summons to surrender. There is lively chat here on this unaccustomed opportunity for exchange of notes and queries.

The first greetings are not all so dramatic as might be thought, for so grave an occasion. "Well, Billy, old boy, how goes it?" asks one loyal West Pointer of a classmate he had been fighting for four years. "Bad, bad, Charlie, bad I tell you; but have you got any whisky?" was the response,—not poetic, not idealistic, but historic; founded on fact as to the strength of the demand, but without evidence of the questionable maxim that the demand creates the supply. More of the economic truth was manifest that scarcity enhances value.

Everybody seems acquiescent, and for the moment cheerful,—except Sheridan. He does not like the cessation of hostilities, and does not conceal his opinion. His natural disposition was not sweetened by the circumstance that he was fired on by some of the Confederates as he was coming up to the meeting under the truce. He is for unconditional surrender, and thinks we should have banged right on and settled all questions without asking them. He strongly intimates that some of the free-thinking rebel cavalry might take advantage of the truce to get away from us. But the Confederate officers, one and all, Gordon, Wilcox, Heth, "Rooney" Lee, and all the rest assure him of their good faith, and that the game is up for them.

But suddenly a sharp firing cuts the air about our ears,—musketry and artillery,—out beyond us on the Lynchburg pike, where it seems Sheridan had sent Gregg's command to stop any free-riding pranks that might be played. Gordon springs up from his pile of rails with an air of astonishment and vexation, declaring that for his part he had sent out in good faith orders to hold things as they are. And he glances more than inquiringly at Sheridan. "Oh, never mind," says Sheridan, "I know about it. Let 'em fight!" with two simple words added, which literally taken are supposed to express a condemnatory judgment, but in Sheridan's rhetoric convey his appreciation of highly satisfactory qualities of his men,—especially just now.

One o'clock comes; no answer from Lee. Nothing for us but to shake hands and take arms to resume hostilities.

As I turned to go, General Griffin said to me in a low voice, "Prepare to make, or receive, an attack in ten minutes!" It was a sudden change of tone in our relations, and brought a queer sensation. Where my troops had halted, the opposing lines were in close proximity. The men had stacked arms and were resting in place. It did not seem like war we were to recommence, but wilful murder. But the order was only to "prepare," and that we did. Our troops were in good position,—my advanced line across the road; and we stood fast intensely waiting. I had mounted and sat looking at the scene before me, thinking of all that was impending and depending; when I felt coming in upon me a strange sense of some presence invisible but powerful—like those unearthly visitants told of in ancient story, charged with supernal message. Disquieted, I turned about; and there behind me, riding in between my two lines, appeared a commanding form, superbly mounted, richly accoutred; of imposing bearing, noble countenance, with expression of deep sadness overmastered by deeper strength. It is no other than Robert E. Lee! And seen by me for the first time within my own lines. I sat immovable, with a certain awe and admiration. He was coming, with a single staff-officer¹ for the great appointed meeting which was to determine momentous issues.

Not long after, by another inleading road, appeared another form—plain, unassuming, simple, and familiar to our eyes; but to the thought as much inspiring awe as Lee in his splendor and his sadness. It is Grant! He, too, comes with a single aide,—a staff-officer of Sheridan's.² Slouched hat without cord; common soldier's blouse, unbuttoned, on which, however, the four stars; high boots, mud-splashed to the top, trousers tucked inside; no sword, but the sword-hand deep in the pocket; sitting his saddle with the ease of a born master; taking no notice of anything, all his faculties gathered into intense thought and mighty calm. He seemed greater than I had ever seen him,—a

¹Colonel Marshall, chief of staff.

²Colonel Newhall.

look as of another world about him. No wonder I forgot altogether to salute him. Anything like that would have been too little.

He rode on to meet Lee at the courthouse. What momentous issues had these two souls to declare! Neither of them, in truth, free, nor held in individual bounds alone; no longer testing each other's powers and resources; no longer weighing the chances of daring or desperate conflict. Instruments of God's hands, they were now to record His decree!

But the final word is not long coming now. Staff-officers are flying, crying "Lee surrenders!" Ah, there was some kind of strength left among those worn and famished men belting the hills around the springs of the Appomattox, who rent the air with shouting and uproar, as if earth and sea had joined the song. Our men did what they thought their share, and then went to sleep, as they had need to do; but in the opposite camp they acted as if they had got hold of something too good to keep, and gave it to the stars.

Besides, they had a supper that night,—which was something of a novelty. For we had divided rations with our old antagonists now that they were by our side as suffering brothers. In truth, Longstreet had come over to our camp that evening with an unwonted moisture on his martial cheek and compressed words on his lips: "Gentlemen, I must speak plainly; we are starving over there. For God's sake, can you send us something?" We were men; and we acted like men, knowing we should suffer for it ourselves. We were too short-rationed also, and had been for days, and must be for days to come. But we forgot Andersonville and Belle Isle that night, and sent over to that starving camp share and share alike for all there with ourselves; nor thinking the merits of the case diminished by the circumstance that part of these provisions was what Sheridan had captured from their trains the night before.

At last we sleep—those who can. And so ended that 9th of April, 1865,—Palm Sunday—in that obscure

little Virginia village now blazoned for immortal fame. Graver destinies were determined on that humble field than on many of classic and poetic fame. And though the issue brought bitterness to some, yet the heart of humanity the world over thrilled at the tidings. To us, I know, who there fell asleep that night, amidst memories of things that never can be told, it came like that Palm Sunday of old, when the rejoicing multitude met the meekly riding King, and cried "Peace in Heaven; glory in the highest!"

Late that night I was summoned to headquarters, where General Griffin informed me that I was to command the parade on the occasion of the formal surrender of the arms and colors of Lee's army. He said the Confederates had begged hard to be allowed to stack their arms on the ground where they were, and let us go and pick them up after they had gone; but that Grant did not think this quite respectful enough to anybody, including the United States of America; and while he would have all private property respected, and would permit officers to retain their side arms, he insisted that the surrendering army as such should march out in due order, and lay down all tokens of Confederate authority and organized hostility to the United States, in immediate presence of some representative portion of the Union army. Griffin added in a significant tone that Grant wished the ceremony to be as simple as possible, and that nothing should be done to humiliate the manhood of the Southern soldiers.

We felt this honor, but fain would share it. We missed our Second and Sixth Corps. They were only three miles away, and just moving back to Burkeville. We could not but feel something more than a wish that they should be brought up to be participants in a consummation to which they perhaps more than any had contributed. But whatever of honor or privilege came to us of the Fifth Corps was accepted not as for any pre-eminent work or worth of ours, but in the name of the whole noble Army of the Potomac; with loving remembrance of every man, whether on horse

or foot or cannon-caisson, whether with shoulder-strap of office or of knapsack,—of every man, whether his heart beat high with the joy of this hour, or was long since stilled in the shallow trenches that furrow the red earth from the Antietam to the Appomattox!

On the morning of the 11th our division had been moved over to relieve Turner's of the twenty-Fourth Corps, Army of the James, near the courthouse, where they had been receiving some of the surrendered arms, especially of the artillery on their front, while Mackenzie's cavalry had received the surrendered sabres of W. H. F. Lee's command.

At noon of the 11th these troops of the Army of the James took up the march to Lynchburg, to make sure of that yet doubtful point of advantage. Lee and Grant had both gone,—Lee for Richmond to see his dying wife, Grant for Washington, only that once more to see again Lincoln living. The business transactions had been settled; the parole papers made out; all was ready for the last turn,—the dissolving-view of the Army of Northern Virginia.

It was now the morning of the 12th of April. I had been ordered to have my lines formed for the ceremony at sunrise. It was a chill gray morning, depressing to the senses. But our hearts made warmth. Great memories uprose; great thoughts went forward. We formed along the principal street, from the bluff bank of the stream to near the courthouse on the left,—to face the last line of battle, and receive the last remnant of the arms and colors of that great army ours had been created to confront for all that death can do for life. We were remnants also,—Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York,—veterans, and replaced veterans; cut to pieces, cut down, consolidated, divisions into brigades, regiments into one gathered by State origin, back to their birth-place; this little line—quintessence or metempsychosis of Porter's old corps of Gaines's Mill and Malvern Hill; men of near blood born, made nearer by blood shed. Those facing us—now thank God,—the same.

Our earnest eyes scan the busy groups on the opposite slopes, breaking camp for the last time,—taking down their little shelter-tents and folding them carefully, as precious things, then slowly forming ranks as for unwelcome duty. And now they move. The dusky swarms forge forward into gray columns of march. On they come, with the old swinging route step, and swaying battle-flags. In the van, the proud Confederate ensign,—the great field of white and for canton the star-strewn cross of blue on a field of red, this latter escutcheon also the regimental battle-flags—following on crowded so thick, by thinning out of men, that the whole column seemed crowned with red. At the right of our line our little group mounted beneath our flags, the red maltese cross on a field of white, erewhile so bravely borne through many a field more crimson than itself, its mystic meaning now ruling all.

This was the last scene of such momentous history that I was impelled to render some token of recognition; some honor also to manhood so high.

Instructions had been given; and when the head of each division column comes opposite our group, our bugle sounds the signal and instantly our whole line from right to left, regiment by regiment in succession, gives the soldier's salutation,—from the "order arms" to the old "carry"—the marching salute. Gordon at the head of the column, riding with heavy spirit and downcast face, catches the sound of shifting arms, looks up, and, taking the meaning, wheels superbly, making with himself and his horse one uplifted figure, with profound salutation as he drops the point of his sword to the boot toe; then facing to his own command, gives word for his successive brigades to pass us with the same position of the manual,—honor answering honor. On our part not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying, nor motion of man standing again at the order; but an awed stillness rather and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!

As each successive division masks our own, it halts

the men face inward towards us across the road, twelve feet away; then carefully "dress" their line, each captain taking pains for the good appearance of his company, worn and torn and half starved as they were. The field and staff take their positions in the intervals of regiments; generals in rear of their commands. They fix bayonets, stack arms; then, hesitatingly, remove cartridge-boxes and lay them down. Lastly,—reluctantly, with agony of expression,—they tenderly fold their flags, battle-worn and torn, blood-stained, heart-holding colors, and lay them down; some frenziedly rushing from the ranks, kneeling over them, clinging to them, pressing them to their lips with burning tears. And only the Flag of the Union greets the sky!

What visions thronged as we looked into each others' eyes! Here pass the men of Antietam, the Bloody Lane, the Sunken Road, the Cornfield, the Burnside-Bridge; the men whom Stonewall Jackson on the second night at Fredericksburg begged Lee to let him take and crush the two corps of the Army of the Potomac huddled in the streets in darkness and confusion; the men who swept away the Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville; who left six thousand of their companions around the bases of Culp's and Cemetery Hills at Gettysburg; these survivors of the terrible Wilderness, the Bloody-Angle at Spottsylvania, the slaughter pen of Cold Harbor, the whirlpool of Bethesada Church!

Here comes Cobb's Georgia Legion, which held the stonewall on Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg, close before which we piled our dead for breastworks so that the living might stay and live.

Here too come Gordon's Georgians and Hoke's North Carolinians, who stood before the terrific mine explosion at Petersburg, and advancing retook the smoking crater and the dismal heaps of dead—ours more than theirs—huddled in the ghastly chasm.

Here are the men of McGowan, Hunton, and Scales, who broke the Fifth Corps lines on the White Oak road,

and were so desperately driven back on that forlorn night of March 31st by my thrice-decimated brigade.

Now comes Anderson's Fourth Corps,—only Bushrod Johnson's division left, and this the remnant of those we fought so fiercely on the Quaker road, two weeks ago, with Wise's Legion, too fierce for its own good.

Here passes the proud remnant of Ransom's North Carolinians we swept through Five Forks ten days ago,—and all the little that was left of this division in the sharp passages at Sailor's Creek five days thereafter.

Now makes its last front A. P. Hill's old corps,—Heth now at the head, since Hill had gone too far forward ever to return: the men who poured destruction into our division at Shepardstown Ford, Antietam, in '62, when Hill reported the Potomac running blue with our bodies; the men who opened the desperate first day's fight at Gettysburg, where withstanding them so stubbornly our Robinson's brigades lost 1185 men, and the Iron Brigade alone 1153,—these men of Heth's division here too losing 2850 men, companions of these now looking into our faces so differently.

What is this but the remnant of Mahone's division, last seen by us at the North Anna? its thinned ranks of worn, bright-eyed men recalling scenes of costly valor and ever-remembered history.

Now the sad great pageant,—Longstreet and his men! What shall we give them for greeting that has not already been spoken in volleys of thunder and written in lines of fire on all the river-banks of Virginia? Shall we go back to Gaines's Mill and Malvern Hill? Or to the Antietam of Maryland, or Gettysburg of Pennsylvania?—deepest graven of all. For here is what remains of Kershaw's division, which left 40 per cent. of its men at Antietam, and at Gettysburg with Barksdale's and Semmes's brigades tore through the Peach Orchard, rolling up the right of our gallant Third Corps, sweeping over the proud batteries of Massachusetts,—Bigelow and Philips,—where under the smoke we saw the earth brown and blue with prostrate bodies of horses

and men, and the tongues of overturned cannon and caissons pointing grim and stark in the air.

Then in the Wilderness and at Spottsylvania Kershaw again, in deeds of awful glory, and thereafter, for all their losses, holding their name and fame, until fate met them at Sailor's Creek, where all but these, with Kershaw himself, and Ewell, and so many more, gave up their arms and hopes,—all, indeed, but manhood's honor.

With what strange emotion I looked into these faces before which in the mad assault on Rives's Salient, June 18, '64, I was left for dead under their eyes! It is by miracles we have lived to see this day,—any of us standing here.

Now comes the sinewy remnant of fierce Hood's division, which at Gettysburg we saw pouring through the Devil's Den, and the Plum Run gorge; turning again by the left our stubborn Third Corps, then swarming up the rocky bastions of Round Top, to be met there by equal valor, which changed Lee's whole plan of battle, and perhaps the story of Gettysburg.

Ah, is this Pickett's division?—this little group, left of those who on the lurid last day of Gettysburg breasted level cross-fire and thunderbolts of storm, to be strewn back drifting wrecks, where after that awful, futile, pitiful charge we buried them in graves a furlong wide, with names unknown!

Met again in the terrible cyclone-sweep over the breastworks at Five Forks; met now, so thin, so pale, purged of the mortal,—as if knowing pain or joy no more. How could we help falling on our knees,—all of us together,—and praying God to pity and forgive us all!

Thus, all day long, division after division comes and goes,—the surrendered arms being removed by our wagons in the intervals, the cartridge-boxes emptied in the street when the ammunition was found unserviceable, our men meanwhile resting in place.

When all is over, in the dusk of evening, the long lines of scattered cartridges are set on fire; and the lurid flames

wreathing the blackness of earthly shadows give an un-earthly border to our parting.

Then, stripped of every token of enmity or instrument of power to hurt, they march off to give their word of honor never to lift arms against the old flag again till its holders release them from their promise. Then, their ranks broken,—the bonds that bound them fused away by forces stronger than fire,—they are free at last to go where they will; to find their homes, now most likely stricken, despoiled by war.

Twenty-seven thousand men paroled; seventeen thousand stand of arms laid down or gathered up; a hundred battle-flags. But regiments and brigades—or what is left of them—have scarce a score of arms to surrender; having thrown them away by road and riverside in weariness of flight or hopelessness of heart, disdaining to carry them longer but to disaster. And many a bare staff was there laid down, from which the ensign had been torn in the passion and struggle of emotions, and divided piece by piece,—a blurred or shrunken star, a rag of smoke-stained blue from the war-worn cross, a shred of deepened dye from the rent field of red,—to be treasured for precious keepsakes of manhood's test and heirlooms for their children.

Nor blame them too much for this; nor us for not blaming them more. Although, as we believed, fatally wrong in striking at the old flag, misreading its deeper meaning and the innermost law of the people's life, blind to the signs of the times in the march of man, they fought as they were taught, true to such ideals as they saw, and put into their cause their best. For us they were fellow-soldiers as well, suffering the fate of arms. We could not look into those brave, bronzed faces, and those battered flags we had met on so many fields where glorious manhood lent a glory to the earth that bore it, and think of personal hate and mean revenge. Whoever had misled these men, we had not. We had led them back, home. Whoever had made that quarrel, we had not. It was a remnant of the inherited curse for sin. We had purged it away, with blood-offerings. We

were all of us together factors of that high will which, working often through illusions of the human, and following ideals that lead through storms, evolves the enfranchisement of man.

Forgive us, therefore, if from stern, steadfast faces eyes dimmed with tears gazed at each other across that pile of storied relics so dearly there laid down, and brothers' hands were fain to reach across that rushing tide of memories which divided us yet made us forever one.

It was our glory only that the victory we had won was for country; for the well-being of others, of these men before us as well as for ourselves and ours. Our joy was a deep, far, unspoken satisfaction,—the approval, as it were, of some voiceless and veiled divinity like the appointed "Angel of the Nation" of which the old scriptures tell—leading and looking far, yet mindful of sorrows; standing above all human strife and fierce passages of trial; not marking faults nor seeking blame; transmuting into factors of the final good corrected errors and forgiven sins; assuring of immortal inheritance all pure purpose and noble endeavor, humblest service and costliest sacrifice, unconscious and even mistaken martyrdoms offered and suffered for the sake of man.





